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TAGS: PREL PHUM UNSC BM CH TH
SUBJECT: READOUT: SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR SOCIAL ISSUES
REES MEETINGS WITH THAI MFA OFFICIALS

Classified By: Political Officer J.R. Littlejohn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a February 12-13 visit to Bangkok, Special Representative for Social Issues, Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, raised concern about refugees and respect for human rights with Thai MFA officials. The MFA Director General for American Affairs called Burma "Thailand's Mexico" in response to Rees's suggestion that Thailand should do more about reports of refugees being prevented from entering camps in Thailand. In a separate meeting, the Acting Director of the East Asian Division suggested that Thailand could help deliver Chinese support on Burma issues. He suggested it would be best not to limit one's focus to the Burmese use of rape as a state instrument. End summary.

UNCSCW RESOLUTIONS

¶2. (C) On February 12, Special Representative for Social Issues Rees met with MFA Department of American and South Pacific Affairs Director General Nongnuth Phetcharatana to solicit support for U.S.-sponsored resolutions in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Ambassador Rees explained that one resolution will call attention to forced/early marriage, while another expresses deep concern about the practice of infanticide. He also discussed the Burmese government's use of rape as an instrument of state policy, and the Thai-Burma border refugee situation. Nongnuth said she would raise the CSW resolutions with her counterparts in the relevant ministries.

BURMA AS "THAILAND'S MEXICO"

¶3. (C) Responding to Rees's expression of concern for refugees, DG Nongnuth admitted she had not been to the border camp area, but she said the refugee camp situation reflected Burma's status, which she considered analogous to "Thailand's Mexico," and the USG should understand Thailand's concerns. She offered familiar arguments, such as that refugees "have it better than local Thai villagers," and that Thailand could not accommodate any more refugees. She said permitting more refugees to enter would contribute to the "pull factor" drawing more people to Thailand and contributing to an open-ended refugee problem. Ambassador Rees suggested that the USG was willing to assist, and planned to resettle thousands of refugees from Thailand this year. Ambassador Rees also reiterated suggestions he had made to the Prime Minister's Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs, Ambassador Surapong Jayanama (see Septel), suggesting that the government of Thailand should raise directly with the government of Burma the issue of mass rape as an apparent tool of state policy. DG Nongnuth responded that it was good

that Ambassador Rees had spoken to Surapong about this because he has significant influence with the Prime Minister and other senior members of the interim government.

MESSAGE FROM MFA EAST ASIAN AFFAIRS DIVISION I (BURMA)

¶4. (C) On February 12, East Asian Affairs Division I Director Kallayana Vipattipumiprates told Ambassador Rees that Thailand was closely coordinating with China and believes the RTG can bring the PRC on board for a collaborative approach toward constructive dialogue with Burma. When we later followed up with Kallayana on this issue, he said that Thai officials had been "comparing notes" with the Chinese embassies in Rangoon and Bangkok, as well as discussing Burmese issues with the MFA in Beijing. Kallayana emphasized that coordination of efforts was essential, especially since Thailand and even ASEAN do not wield as much influence on the Burmese as China does.

RAPE AS A POLITICAL TOOL

¶5. (C) Responding to concerns that Ambassador Rees expressed about the Burmese government's use of rape as a state instrument, Kallayana said that it would be better not to focus narrowly on that issue. Thailand would like to see the government of Burma respond to all issues falling under the human rights umbrella, of which rape is just one. Thailand would also like the GOB to address issues such as forced labor, and the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Ambassador Rees agreed that these other issues were important, but felt that the use of rape also deserved special attention.

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¶6. (C) Ambassador Rees has cleared this message.
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